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CREATING THE “AMBIANCE” FOR SUCCESS

It takes many skills to operate a business, and successful entrepreneurs use the skills they have honed in their life experiences and bring those to their businesses. Jennifer Downey, President of Ambiance Incorporated, combined her very unique experiences gathered as a professional fashion model, stock trader and public relations specialist to create a highly successful chain of retail stores.

An aspiring actress in 1974, Ms. Downey pursued her dream of life on the stage by moving from Cleveland to New York City. She studied acting at Pace University, but she supplemented the acting classes with some business classes. Both areas of studies served her well. She returned to Cleveland to take a job in the trading department of a brokerage firm while gaining side work as a fashion model.

By 1978, Ms. Downey became Cleveland’s first woman Over-the-Counter stock trader, while her fashion modeling work opened other doors for her and helped hone her public relations skills. She was introduced to Harvey Keiluhn, the founder of the then struggling Ambiance Incorporated, ultimately leaving her stock trading career to join Ambiance in 1982.

Ambiance, known as “The Store for Lovers”, was facing an image crisis. Recognizing the strong potential for the concept, Jennifer used the business acumen she had acquired to keep the company’s finances in order while using her public relations skills to help to reinvent Ambiance. She helped to create a business culture that promotes marriage and family values by encouraging couples to realize how rewarding the intimate side of their long-term relationship can be. Ambiance locations now feature a full selection of lingerie, lotions, and games.

Jennifer presently serves as the President of Ambiance, the Store for Lovers, and, under her leadership, it has grown to nine locations and an E-commerce Internet website that can be accessed at www.Ambiance.com. KeyBank, in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), have supported Ambiance through its growth. Ambiance has been the recipient of three SBA guaranteed loans through KeyBank, and these were used to finance the opening of additional locations.

“Most small businesses need capital in order to expand, and Ambiance is no different. KeyBank and the SBA have been instrumental in helping me to grow my business”, said Jennifer Downey. “Their support, help and guidance throughout the loan process, has been invaluable.”

Besides doing her all to make Ambiance “THE” place to shop to enhance your romance, Jennifer donates her time to a myriad of community organizations. She currently serves as the President of the Cleveland chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO). She is on the Board of Directors of the Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE), and serves on the Board of Advisors to Cleveland Saves, to name just a few. She has also earned many honors over her 20+ year career at Ambiance, including being named the SBA Cleveland District Office’s Women in Business Advocate of the Year award in 2000.